

In Search of *Erebia scipio* Bdv.: Southern France, July 1973

By Dr C. G. M. de WORMS

Erebia scipio Boisduval has indeed been one of the most elusive and difficult insects to obtain among the 46 species now recognised among its genus in Europe, and indeed few British collectors seem to have seen it alive in any numbers during the first half of this century and not many in the last two decades. It inhabits high scree at not less than 5000 ft and has a most restricted range in southern France from Mont Ventoux in the west to the Italian border of the Alpes Maritimes in the east and extending to the Hautes Alpes northwards. In his Presidential address in January 1952 to the South London Entomological and Natural History Society, Mr T. G. Howarth made brief reference to his exploits on the Mont de Lure in Provence where he obtained a fine series of this butterfly in late July 1950. Since then very little has been heard of its occurrence and indeed there were reports that it had virtually died out from some of its former better-known haunts. However, in 1972 I happened to meet Mr L. McLeod who is doing special research work quite near Mont Ventoux. He mentioned that *E. scipio* had reappeared on this mountain in some numbers that summer. Col. J. N. Eliot also confirmed other fairly recent captures of this insect which was encouraging. With these records in view, Major General Sir George Johnson considered it well worth while trying to find this very local butterfly in some of its former localities.

Accordingly he kindly picked me up in his car in Surrey on 13th July and after spending the night at Folkestone we crossed by the car ferry from Dover on the Quatorze Juillet to find northern France far from being in a state of fête. The fine and very warm spell of weather had just broken as we made our way south across the northern plain and after flanking Rheims, we eventually put up at a very nice hotel at Sept. Saulx. Our destination on 15th July was Chalon-sur-Saône which had proved a very good centre in 1970 for the *Apaturas*. On the 16th we left our hotel in Chalon at an early hour and headed for the Forêt de Montcoy. Fortunately the weather had relented and when we reached this area it was warm and sunny. One of our first encounters were some worn specimens of *Lopinga achine* Scop. *Aphantopus hyperanthus* L. was in numbers with some f. *arete*. A tall species of *umbellifer* seemed a great attractant, especially for *Araschnia levana* L. which was in great plenty and very fresh as also were *Argynnis paphia* L. and *Fabriciana adippe* Schiff., but both *Mellicta athalia* and *Brenthis daphne* Schiff. were past their best. It was not long before males of *Apatura iris* appeared well before midday, often flying round the car and sometimes settling in the roadway. But it was soon apparent that they were not nearly so numerous as in 1970 when my companion had seen

them in dozens. On this occasion we only recorded a single *Apatura ilia* Schiff. of f. *clytie* Schiff. which was already worn.

The morning of the 17th we went further afield to another *forêt* which proved very poor for species so we returned to our former haunt where we saw and took further *A. iris*. Most of the species of the previous day with the addition of *Issoria lathonia* L. and *Leptidea sinapis* L. were about with the commoner Vanessids. We once more escaped from the heat of the day by visiting a delightful little restaurant, tucked away on a remote road in the forest.

We set out early on 18th July for a further few hundred miles to the south travelling via Grenoble and finally staying at a very pleasant hotel at Château Arnoux at the junctions of the roads to Avignon and Digne which was only 15 miles away. This was to be our headquarters for a further week. The next morning we motored to the Mont de Lure, some 20 miles away. There is now a good road right over the summit at nearly 6000 ft. The day was sunny but a strong wind made conditions none too easy at the high levels. En route through the forest on the lower slopes we had stopped at several spots where butterflies were flying in plenty, notably at one which harboured a large clump of the tall ground elder which was alive with lepidoptera. Both sexes of *Erebia ligea* L. were abundant but needed picking, while the elder provided many *A. paphia*, a few *B. daphne* and *Mesoacidalia aglaia* L. together with some huge *Brintesia circe* F. and a good many still fresh females of *Nordmannia ilicis* Esp. with orange patches. When we reached the summit we found what appeared to be the path where Mr Howarth had had such success with *Erebia scipio* Bdv. in 1950, but all that came into our nets were several rather small *E. meolans* de Prunner careering over the rough scree. We had considered descending by the road on the north face, but when we saw an ominous notice about rock falls, we decided to return by our original route which proved most fortunate, as we stopped in the early afternoon on the edge of some scree where a number of *Erebias* were flying. We caught several which we thought were *E. scipio* but back at the hotel they once more proved to be only *E. meolans*. However, encouraged by these numbers of *Erebias* we returned the next morning of the 20th under ideal conditions with no wind and a cloudless sky. The road at about 5000 ft was constructed along a fairly steep cliff of white scree with very little vegetation leading from a gap with a precipice facing to the north. I noticed several *Erebias* flying along the bank on this stretch of the road and the first one I caught was an undoubted male *E. scipio*. It had the squarer forewings with two apical spots and the black undersides of the hindwings, completely devoid of spots which readily distinguishes it from males of *E. meolans*. We spent the next few hours parading up and down this half-mile length of road where *E. scipio* males were flying in numbers, often several together, but never easy to

catch as they were most alert and dodgy. Almost all those taken seemed to be in prime condition and most handsome with their velvety black livery. Several *Parnassius apollo* L. were flying at higher levels among trees and herbage together with some large *Hipparchia semele* L. Other new species seen that day included *Coenonympha arcania* L. and *Polygonia egea* L. at the lower levels. Another superb day welcomed us on 21st July when we once more ascended the Mont de Lure to our area of the previous day where *E. scipio* males were even more plentiful. They seemed to hug the bare scree and never to leave it. In areas where any substantial vegetation occurred, there was not a sign of them. Some large *Lasioommata maera* L. were also flying on the scree and lower down were rather worn *Satyrus ferula* L.

On 22nd July we motored to Digne which I had last visited in August 1963. We had to approach the town by a detour on the south bank of the River Bléonne as a few days before our arrival in this region the main bridge into Digne had been swept away after torrential rains lasting four days. However the floods had subsided by the time we attempted to visit that rich region. Our first stop outside the town was where the road to the mountains of the Dourbes range forks from that to the Thermes. I noticed a Skipper settled on a plant overhanging the river and on capture it proved to be *Pyrgus foulquieri* Oberthür, quite a local species. A field nearby harboured many of the Tiger moth *Callimorpha hera* L.

We then followed the route up the winding road leading towards the valley below the Dourbes heights which had been one of my collecting grounds in 1963, but almost the only butterflies there were a quantity of *Lysandra coridon* Poda and a few *Plebeius argus* L. However, on our descent we found a glade with plenty of lepidopterous life including *Iphiclides podalirius* L. and *Hipparchia fagi* Scop. darting about among the small oaks. The only *Leptidea* I saw turned out to be *L. duponcheli* Staud. with the dark underside to its antennae. Among the more interesting Blues were *Agrodiaetus ripartii* Freyer and *Meleageria daphnis* Schiff. *Clossiana dia* L., *Pyronia cecilia* Vall. and *Coenonympha dorus* Esp. were also on the wing in this rich locality.

We motored over to the Mont de Lure on the 23rd, again in glorious weather and once more found males of *E. scipio* in quantity, but no sign of any females. As before the patches of elder were alive with insects with many more *E. ligea*, *Brenthis daphne* and *Hipparchia alcyone* Schiff. The morning of 24th July we set out for Mont de Lure, but it became so overcast that we turned back and revisited Digne, this time going to a piece of rough and wooded ground immediately outside the town which had proved so fruitful in 1963. And we were not to be disappointed as the locality had not altered at all in the past ten years and was especially rich in the big Satyrids such as *Brintesia circe* and *Satyrus ferula* F., mainly along a bramble bank.

During our week at Château Arnoux on the warm nights several moths entered our rooms, many of which are well-known common species in England, but a notable visitor was the scarce *Nycteola degenerana* Hübn. On the 25th we left the Digne area and headed for Avignon passing through some picturesque country near Sault where the lavender fields in full bloom were a wonderful sight, though they did not seem to attract many butterflies. We halted several times en route in likely-looking spots. Again the large Satyrids predominated including *H. fagi* and *H. alcyone* with the addition of *Hyponephele lycaon* Kuehn. We skirted the wooded slopes of Mont Ventoux and at a small restaurant where we had lunch, I was surprised to see on the window a perfect specimen of the scarce Emerald moth *Thalera fimbrialis* Scop. We went on through Carpentras to Avignon arriving in the evening. We were later visited by Mr Leonard McLeod whose headquarters were quite close to Mont Ventoux, another mooted locality for *E. scipio*. July 26 dawned fine but very windy in the Avignon region so that we decided to try the Vallée de la Nesque recommended by Mr McLeod. This turned out to be a deep gorge to the south-east of Avignon with a very tortuous road leading along a steep cliff edge with a good precipice. Not much seemed to be flying till we got about half way along the gorge when we happened to stop at a bend in the route with a narrow path leading through some trees to a small glade which appeared to be full of insects. One of the notable features was the numbers of Hairstreaks which covered four species *Quercusia quercus* L., *Nordmannia ilicis* Esp., *N. esculi* Hübn. and *Strymonidia spini* Schiff. A numerous species was the Copper, *Heodes tityrus* Poda, while the chief Satyrids were *Satyrus actaea* Esp. and *Arethusana arethusa* Schiff. Among the skippers were *Erynnis tages* L., *Spialia sertorius* Hoffmann, and *Pyrgus foulquieri* Oberthür, which was one of our main quarries.

We were also surprised to find the whole locality alive with *Lithosia quadra* L. that large Footman with its spectacular female. We revisited this area and special locality on 27th July. In addition to the butterflies already cited we saw our first *Nymphalis polychloros* L. and *Gonepteryx cleopatra* L. as well as *Thymelicus acteon* Rott. and *Carcharodus flocciferus* Zeller. There were also many *Colias australis* Verity flying rapidly over the rugged slopes in the upper part of the valley. The following morning we joined Mr McLeod and Mr Bond a little way beyond Carpentras and made the ascent of Mont Ventoux under ideal conditions. We motored up through the fir forest by a special road that crosses the main *massif*. En route we saw *Nymphalis antiopa* L. and several *Papilio machaon* L., but when we surveyed the white scree near the summit on the north side of the mountain, there was no sign of *E. scipio*. The only high-level Blue there was *Polyommatus eros* Ochs. We started on the return route in the early afternoon stopping at an elder patch which harboured many Hairstreaks, in particular some

outsized *S. snini* and *Q. ouercus*. Satyrids were well to the fore including *H fagi*, *S. actaea*, *S. ferula*, *H. lycaon* and *Chazara briseis* L. Later that day Mr McLeod telephoned us to say he had stayed on and visited the south-facing slope beyond the summit to find *E scipio* flying in plenty, but all males. So on 29th July we motored direct to this area where new roads were being made for military purposes we were told. Here the bare scree is flat and quite accessible, but it was only at its most eastern end that we saw a number of *E. scipio* which flitted up in the rather intermittent sunny intervals which grew more and more infrequent till about midday a complete cloud cover enveloped the summit of Mont Ventoux at just over 6000 ft. The temperature dropped quickly and ended any further collecting for ourselves and for Mr Bartholomew and Mr A. Bond who were also on the same quest. The only additional species we had noted at lower levels was *Brenthis ino* Rott., bringing the total of 85 species of butterflies observed during our 18-day sojourn in France from 14th to 31st July.

On 30th July we motored north up the autoroute via Lyon to Beaune where we spent the night before doing another stretch of 300 miles across country to Arras for a further night.

Early on 1st August still in glorious weather we embarked at Calais and were back that afternoon in Surrey after a most enjoyable and very successful trip which brought us a fine series of males of *Erebia scipio*. During August Mr McLeod kindly sent several fresh females which only started appearing the first week of that month.

Three Oaks, Woking. 12.x.73.

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Another Record of Migratory Flights of the Dragonfly *Pantala flavescens* (Fabricius) (Odonata, Libellulidae) in Calcutta

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Mitra and Mukherjee (1967) reported a migratory flight of the dragonfly *Pantala flavescens* (Fabr.) in Calcutta noticed by one of them (T.R.M.) in September 1966. The present note records another instance of migratory flight by these dragonflies observed by me six years later in Calcutta.

On the 17th September 1972, while waiting for a conveyance around 10 a.m. at the V.I.P. Road, on the eastern fringe